

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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PREPARED OPENING STATEMENT FOR REP. ED MARKEY (D-MA) ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

I'd like to thank Chairman Cox and ranking Member Turner for calling this meeting today.

I come to this Committee first as the representative of an urban center that was deeply affected by the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The planes that hit New York that day were commandeered in Boston by an Al Qaeda cell that had lived in my district. The funerals of those who died as passengers on those planes were held in Framingham, Natick, Winthrop, Revere and other communities in my district. The economy of part of New England is being held back by a sense that we have not yet responded adequately to the threat posed by terrorism.

Second, I come to this Committee with a commitment to pursue the oversight of the operations and effectiveness of the Department of Homeland Security as if – and because – our lives depend on it. We must be aggressive, targeted and persistent, recognizing that Secretary Ridge has an enormous job, but mindful of our ultimate responsibility to our hometowns and districts. Many observers believe that we cannot expect to see the new department working smoothly for at least two years, given the nature of the forced merger of 22 federal agencies. We must do everything we can to sharply reduce those estimates, because the timing of another Al Qaeda attack could be tied directly to any confusion or lack of clear lines of authority within the department.

We began last week at Code Orange. We begin the work of this Committee at Code Yellow. I believe this Committee must work with the urgency of Code Red to make the country safe.

Ensuring the security of the homeland means making difficult choices and putting some peacetime priorities aside. In particular, it means that we will need to abandon plans to pursue a tax-cutting agenda that starves the government at a time when the public is expecting its government to respond to the growing threat of modern terrorism.

Unfortunately, the President thus far has failed to fund some urgent security needs, such as providing adequate resources for first responders. Instead of beefing up first responder capabilities, local police and fire departments in my district have had to lay first responders off. We also need to ensure that Customs is able to screen all packages entering this country to ensure no weapons of mass destruction are contained therein; prepare the public health system for another biological weapons attack; and secure nuclear weapons materials at the Department of Energy. As this Committee moves ahead with its work, we must make sure that everything is done to thwart "Terrorist Attacks" before every available dollar is lost to "Tax Treats." The local and state people responsible for protecting our hometowns are being asked to do double duty while a privileged few sit at home awaiting the elimination of the double taxation of dividends. That is a blatant unfairness that this Committee must help correct.

A month ago the President referred to a carefully crafted proposal to add \$5 billion in funding for homeland security to the 2003 budget as "unnecessary". The Administration actually threatened to veto any appropriations bill containing this additional funding. Yet last week, after the Republican Congress beat back Democratic efforts to add the money, the President was shocked, shocked to discover that somehow Congress had dropped the ball. It is my hope that this Committee can act as a reality-check on such cynical political gamesmanship.

Homeland security will also require sacrifices from the private sector. For example, the nuclear industry must stop resisting all legislative and Administrative efforts to beef up the security of nuclear reactors, which we know to be at the very top of Al Qaeda's terrorist wish list. The chemical industry must take all necessary steps to prevent a catastrophic release of toxic materials in the event of a terrorist attack. And the owners and operators of this nation's infrastructure, from the internet to financial institutions to oil pipelines, must also do what they have to do. This Committee must exercise aggressive oversight to ensure that the Homeland Security Department assesses the threats to these private sector entities, and that the private sector approaches homeland security with the same levels of corporate responsibility as they approach their bottom lines.

The reality of terror is unforgiving. September 11 changed everything. The people know it. Now they are wondering whether the Congress knows it. We can show them that we are not going to rest until we have asked the hard questions and demanded and received the hard answers to what is needed to close our homeland security vulnerability gap, and then insisted on all the steps that that investigation shows is necessary.

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